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BY ELIHU PALMER.

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Comments upon the Sacred Writings of the Jews and Christians. Exodus Chapter 10.

IN our last comment we passed over a considerable portion of the miraculous accounts contained in the 9th chapter of this book. What remains is of a similar cast and character to that which preceded, and it is only necessary to add a single remark, and then proceed in our enquiries. It appears, by the statement made in this chapter, that the cattle belonging to the Egyptians were, by the mighty power of God, killed twice over; for in the sixth verse it is said, "And the Lord did that thing on the morrow, and *a'*l the cattle of Egypt died." The 25th verse is as follows: "And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt, and all that was in the field, both man and beast." What is called revelation is never consistent with itself; even in the relation of common facts, (which facts by the way make no part of revelation) there is such incoherence and such incongruity as will for ever stamp this book with the character of insurmountable inconsistency.—The tenth chapter is composed of similar materials, and partakes of the general character of those which preceded. There are but two ideas of magnitude contained in the whole chapter. The first is the working of miracles by the power of God; the second, the same power of God employed in hardening the heart of Pharaoh and annihilating all the beneficial consequences which would otherwise have been produced by the omnipotence of Jehovah. Swarms of locusts and preternatural darkness are here employed for the accomplishment of an object which, according to the very story it-

self, the God of Moses intended to prevent. Of all the books that ever were written this book of Exodus is surely best entitled to the name of a farce; the predominant characters are the Hebrew divinity, Moses, Aaron and the Egyptian king; to which may be added the magicians of the country aiding and abetting the royal tyrant in his dexterous exploits, to combat the skill and cunning of Jehovah's conjurers. All these with some collateral agents of a subordinate nature impudently present themselves and challenge the homage the respect and high approbation of an enlightened posterity; whereas reason science and human improvement hold such idle tales in sovereign contempt. The state of society in which we live has marked these legacies of antiquity, these fragments of a superstitious age, with a fraudulent character that can never be mistaken. A comparative view of the state of human improvement in different ages and countries would furnish a satisfactory explanation of that miraculous credulity, which has been and still continues in some measure a powerful cause, operating desperately against the dignity and happiness of intelligent life. What have all these Mosaic frogs, and lice, and flies, and locusts to do with the nature of truth or the principles of morality? Who, that reads and reflects at all, can be incapable of discovering in these religious stories of a supernatural kind, all the whim, fancy and fanaticism, which have always resulted from a state of intellectual darkness and the miserable condition in which human life has been generally involved? If supernatural theology did not repel the efforts of enquiring minds, by terrific denunciations, it would soon fall an easy sacrifice to the power of thought, and yield to the efficacious diffusion of human knowledge. Its destiny however is fixed; its fate is decreed beyond the power of revocation. This requires only time—let us have time and the work of intellectual regeneration will become complete and universal.

TO THE EDITOR.

SIR,

Your correspondents are pleased to find you engaged in examining the books attributed to Moses. Such an investigation is highly useful in exposing to public view the gross impositions that have been practised upon man, and the books in question do not appear ever to have been scrutinized with that attention which the subject requires.—If a hundred reflecting beings were to sit down and deliberately commit to paper every thought that should occur on a serious perusal of these records, each one from the mass of matter they contain would probably extract some iniquity or absurdity unnoticed by the others—it is indeed evident, from what has appeared in the Prospect, that nothing is wanting to complete the downfall of superstition, but a public examination of these writings, with a portion of common understanding, which every one possesses. But here the sticklers for revelation will interpose and say, “It is not denied that there are *seeming* “*contradictions*; and, to carnal minds, some exceptionable “passages in the sacred volumes; but let it be remembered, that it is an erroneous and dangerous principle to “judge of a *divine* communication with a *human* and “*corrupted* understanding. The creature will thus be inevitably lost; for *human reason* alas! is a *false* and a “*blind* guide.”—This is a serious and important subject of examination—the whole fabric of Christian superstition is built upon it, and it is the duty both of believers and unbelievers to enquire if they wish to embrace the truth.—How then, or by what means, was this important discovery first brought to light? How has man become acquainted with it? To which of his powers or faculties is this whining position addressed? or by what mental process is the being who sincerely doubts to become convinced of it? Does God bestow upon the human race a faculty whereby to distinguish and exalt them above the rest of creation, and then call upon them by the exercise

of this faculty to furnish or receive evidence of its own incapacity to judge of evidence when presented to it? Does he implant in man reason (or a power of discriminating in matters of importance) and then with the help of this same power cause him to see that it must in the most important of all concerns deceive and betray him? Is he directed to use this faculty only that he may discover by the use of it that it is of no use at all, or rather, that he must by using it irrecoverably damn and destroy himself? To what given extent must this faculty be exercised before by its assistance man shall discern that it never can assist, but must for ever puzzle and confound him? and how can he after once clearly discovering its tendency to perplex and mislead be satisfied that it has not in that very discovery, duped and imposed upon him?—The weakness and insufficiency of human reason must be discovered, either by the help of that same reason (which is no discovery at all) or of some faculty superior or inferior, to it.—Does man possess such superior faculty? or will the libellers of reason contend that he does? certainly not—Into what corner or crevice then of his understanding is it intended to force the base and ungrateful idea, that reason is a blind guide, and in spiritual matters must be renounced? Can the conviction of it be conveyed to man through his senses? If not, it must be cognizable only (if cognizable at all) by some subordinate power or operation of his mind, and by what authority does such inferior power claim dominion over reason, the noblest gift of the Creator?—A single reflection, with its consequences, must for ever prostrate this grand pillar of superstition—"Reason," says a believer, "is a *false witness*; it is a *blind guide*."—How, we again ask, are we to obtain a knowledge of it? Of what nature is the vision by which this blindness is discovered? Reason, as the stigma implies, does not bear testimony against itself—If then this discovering faculty be something inferior to reason, and to which reason is notwithstanding required to yield assent, then the blind are indeed aiming to lead or

direct the blind ; and Christian authority, if it can be relied on, assures us that "*they shall both fall into the ditch.*"

*Profession of faith of a Savoyard Curate, from
Rousseau, continued from our last.*

God is good, nothing is more manifest than this truth ; goodness in man, however, consists in a love to his fellow-creatures, and the goodness of God in a love of order : for it is on such order that the connection and preservation of all things depend. Again, God is just ; this I am fully convinced of, as it is the natural consequence of his goodness. The injustice of men is their own work, not his ; and that moral disorder, which, in the judgment of some philosophers, makes against the system of providence, is in mine the strongest argument for it. Justice in man, indeed, is to render every one his due ; but the justice of God requires, at the hands of every one, an account of the talents with which he has entrusted him.

In the discovery, however, by the force of reason, of those divine attributes, of which I have no absolute idea, I only affirm what I do not clearly comprehend, which is in effect to affirm nothing. I may say, it is true that God is this or that ; I may be sensible of it, and fully convinced within myself that he is so, I am yet never the better able to conceive how, or in what manner, he so is.

In short, the greater efforts I make to contemplate his infinite essence, the less I am able to conceive it : But I am certain that he is, and that is sufficient ; the more he surpasses my conceptions, the more I adore him. I humble myself before him, and say, " Being of beings, I am, " because thou art ; to meditate continually on thee, is to " elevate my thoughts to the fountain of existence. The " most meritorious use of my reason is to be annihilated " before thee : it is the delight of my soul, to feel my weak " faculties overcome by the splendor of thy greatness."

After having thus deduced, from the impressions of perceptible objects, and that innate principle leads me to judge of natural causes from experience, the most important truth ; it remains for me to enquire what maxims I ought to draw from them, for my conduct in life, what rules I ought to prescribe to myself, in order to fulfil my destination on earth, agreeable to the design of him who placed me here. To pursue my own method, I deduce not these rules from the sublime principle of philosophy ; but find them written in indelible characters on my heart. I have only to consult myself concerning what I ought to do ; all that I feel to be right, is right ; whatever I feel to be wrong, is wrong : conscience is the ablest of all casuists, and it is only when we are trafficking with her, that we have recourse to the subtilties of logical ratiocination. The chief of our concerns is that of ourselves ; yet how often have we not been told by the monitor within, that to pursue our own interest at the expence of others would be to do wrong ! we imagine thus, that we are sometimes obeying the impulse of nature, and we are all the while resisting it : In listening to the voice of our senses, we turn a deaf ear to the dictates of our hearts, the active Being obeys, the passive Being commands. Conscience is the voice of the soul, the passions are the voice of the body. Is it surprising that these two voices should sometimes contradict each other ; or can it be doubted, when they do, which ought to be obeyed ? Reason deceives us but too often, and has given us a right to distrust her conclusions ; but conscience never deceives us. She is man's truest and safest guide ; conscience is in the soul, what instinct is in the body. Whoever puts himself under the conduct of his guide, pursues the direct path of nature, and need not fear to be misled.

All the morality of our actions lies in the judgment we ourselves form of them. If virtue be any thing real, it ought to be the same in our hearts as in our actions ; and one of the first rewards of justice, is to be conscious of putting it in practice. If moral goodness be agreeable to our nature, a man cannot be sound of mind, or perfectly

constituted, unless he be good. On the contrary, if it be not so, and man if naturally wicked, he cannot become good without a corruption of his nature; goodness being evidently contrary to his constitution. Formed for the destruction of his fellow-creatures, as the wolf to devour its prey, an humane and compassionate man, would be as depraved an animal as a meek and lamb-like wolf, while virtue only would leave behind it the stings of remorse.

Let us examine ourselves, my young friend, all partiality apart, and see which way our inclinations tend. Which is most agreeable to us, to contemplate the happiness or the miseries of others? Which is most pleasing for us to do, and leaves the most agreeable reflection behind it, an act of benevolence or of mischief? For whom are we most deeply interested at our theatres? Did you take a pleasure in acts of villainy? or do you shed tears seeing the authors of them brought to condign punishment? It has been said that every thing is indifferent to us in which we are interested: the contrary, however, is certain, as the soothing endearments of friendship and humanity console us under affliction; and even in our pleasures we should be too solitary, too miserable, if we had nobody to partake of them with us.

If there be nothing moral in the heart of man, whence arise those transports of admiration and esteem we entertain for heroic actions, and great minds? What has this virtuous enthusiasm to do with our private interest? Wherefore do I rather wish to be an expiring Cato, than a triumphant Cæsar? Deprive our hearts of a natural affection for the sublime and beautiful, and you deprive us of all the pleasures of life. The man, whose meaner passions have stifled, in his narrow soul, such delightful sentiments; he, who, by dint of concentrating all his affections within himself, hath arrived at the pitch of having no regard for any one else, is no longer capable of such transports; his frozen heart never flutters with joy; no sympathetic tenderness brings the tears into his eyes;

he is incapable of enjoyment ; the unhappy wretch is void of sensibility ; he is already dead.

But how great soever may be the number of the wicked ; there are but few of these cadaverous souls, but few persons so insensible, if their own interest be set aside, to what is just and good. Iniquity never pleases unless we profit by it ; in every other case it is natural for us to desire the protection of the innocent. Do we see, for instance, an act of injustice or violence committed in the street, or on the highway ; an emotion of resentment and indignation immediately rises in the heart, and incites us to stand up in defence of the injured or oppressed : but a more powerful consideration restrains us, and the laws deprive individuals of the right of taking upon themselves to avenge insulted innocence. On the contrary, if we happen to be witnesses to any act of compassion or generosity, with what admiration, with what esteem are we instantly inspired ! Who is there that doth not, on such an occasion, say to himself, would I had done as much ? It is certainly of very little consequence to us whether a man was good or bad who lived two thousand years ago ; and yet we are as much affected in this respect, by the relations we meet with in ancient history, as if the transactions recorded had happened in our own times.

To be continued.

*** A Discourse on the baneful effects of ancient superstition, will be delivered by the Editor, to-morrow evening at 8 o'clock, at Shepherd's Long-Room, No. 11, George's-street.

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